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ABSTRACT

Although parental involvement can be important for improving schools, very few parents are involved. This paper explores attitudinal barriers to such involvement from the perspectives of 1,200 superintendents, 664 school board presidents, and 30 state agency officials in six states (Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), compares results with surveys of teacher educators, parents, principals, and teachers; and synthesizes findings into recommendations for developing training guidelines for teacher-parent cooperation. Subjects were given six-part questionnaires, dealing with items ranging from agreement or disagreement with statements about parent involvement to policy involvement statements and demographic items. Results suggest administrators' and board presidents' responses are very similar to those of teachers and principals. The former support the general idea of parental involvement, indicate moderately strong support for involving parents in traditional school roles, but have considerably less support for power-sharing roles. Results also stress the wide variance in involvement interpretation. Eight recommendations for training elementary teachers and three for improving parent involvement conclude the report. (KS)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE FINAL REPORT:

A SURVEY OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND POLICY MAKERS

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Parent Involvement in Education Project

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A. INTRODUCTION

Parent involvement in education can serve as an important factor for improving school effectiveness and success. Using a partnership approach, parents and educators can combine their knowledge, skills and experiences to enhance educational efforts in homes as well as schools. Such an approach could provide valuable input regarding the planning, organization, implementation, evaluation and decision-making with respect to schools and education.

Parent involvement in the schools has been widely discussed in the professional journals of education. However, studies show that parents have very little involvement in most public schools. This survey is the fifth in a series which were conducted to gather information about attitudinal barriers to parent involvement and to examine their implications for teacher training.

This survey of policy makers in six states (Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas) obtained responses from 1,200 school superintendents, 664 school board presidents and 30 selected state education agency officials. They were asked about their general attitudes toward parent involvement, their attitudes toward specific types of parent involvement, and the extent of certain parent activities in their schools. They were also asked about the existence of any state or district policies encouraging parent involvement.

This executive summary reports on the parent involvement perspectives of school goveranance persons or policy makers. These findings have implications for developing better parent involvement programs and for training teachers to further involve parents in children's education at home as well as at school. Ultimately, such information can help foster the partnership needed between parents and educators to help ensure the desired excellence in education.

B. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purposes of this survey were to (1) gather information about various aspects of parent involvement in education from the perspectives of educational policy makers/administrators--specifically school superintendents, school board presidents, and state department of education officials in the SEDL six-state region; (2) compare the results of this data gathering effort with those from surveys of teacher educators, parents, principals and teachers; and (3) synthesize the findings into recommendations for developing guidelines and strategies in training elementary school teachers for involving parents in their children's education at home and at school.

In particular, policy makers/administrators were asked their opinions about the value of parent involvement in education, the kinds of decisions it would be useful for parents to participate in, the importance of certain parent involvement roles, the prevalence of parent involvement activities in schools or how much training/technical assistance is offered in school

districts regarding parent involvement activities, and the existence of parent involvement in education policies. Results were expected to provide important insights from a stakeholder group that is deemed critical to the success of parent involvement in all aspects of the educational process.

C. METHODOLOGY

This study surveyed school governance persons in six states. The procedures for conducting the survey are discussed in the following sections.

1. Selection of Subjects

The sample of subjects was selected from within SEDL's six-state region (Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas). Three groups of subjects were sampled: (1) local school district superintendents, (2) presidents of local district school boards, and (3) certain officials in state departments of education. The sample included superintendents and school board presidents in cities where the parent survey was conducted. This allowed for comparisons between parent and school official perspectives concerning parent involvement. The sample of superintendents and school board presidents included the entire population of both groups in each of the six states.

A slightly different procedure was used to select the sample of state department of education officials. Education directories for each of the six states were obtained then examined for potential subjects. Initial efforts identified the following officials as possibilities for the research effort: the Directors of Federal Programs, Special Education, Teacher Certification, Instruction, Community Education, Teacher Education, Bilingual Education and Staff Development/Inservice Education or Training. In conversations with top state agency persons, it was determined that the following five agency officials would best provide the kind of parent involvement information being sought:

- Director/Coordinator of Federal Programs
- Director/Coordinator of Special Education
- Director/Coordinator of Staff Development and Inservice Education
- Director/Coordinator of Instruction (Elementary level)
- Director/Coordinator of Teacher Certification and/or Teacher Education

Another factor in selecting these state department of education officials sample was that they were common titles across the six state department of education agencies.

A total of 4,997 subjects were selected for the parent involvement survey. Of these, 2,538 were school superintendents, 2,423 were school board presidents, and 36 were state department of education officials.

Table 1 shows a breakdown of sample subjects by group and by state.

TABLE 1
SAMPLE BREAKDOWN OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS/SCHOOL POLICY MAKER SUBJECTS

Subject	Number by State					
	AR	LA	MS	NM	OK	TX
School Superintendents*	371	68	168	95	716	1,121
School Board Presidents*	376	65	168	91	637	1,086
State Department of Education Officials	5	5	5	5	5	11

*These totals represent the number of superintendents and board presidents in each state as identified by Market Data Retrieval (Denver, CO) in computerized mailing lists.

2. Instrumentation

A mailed, self-report written questionnaire was used as the data gathering tool for this survey. The instrument is entitled "The Parent Involvement Questionnaire (PIQ)." Two versions of the instrument were developed and utilized in the research effort--one for school board presidents and superintendents, and a slightly modified version for state education agency officials.

The PIQ was made up of six parts. Part One contained 20 general statements about parent involvement. Part Two consisted of 11 school decisions with which parents could be involved. In Part Three, 7 parent involvement roles were listed and described. For Part Four, 20 parent involvement activities were listed. Part Five consisted of 14 parent involvement policy statements. Part Six was made up of 10 demographic items.

3. Data Collection

Several procedures were employed during the survey data collection phase. First, numbers were assigned to each instrument and batches were designated for each state. Second, the codes for keypunching questionnaires were identified and finalized. Third, a survey packet was prepared and mailed to each subject. Included in the information was a cover letter, the instrument and a self-addressed, postage-paid return envelope. These envelopes were labelled so as to ensure their prompt return.

As each survey was received, it was checked off the master list and tallied on the appropriate return count sheet. About three weeks after the initial questionnaire mail out, a follow-up post card was sent to non-respondents. There were 4,315 of these mailed. Approximately six weeks from the first mailing, a second follow-up mailing was conducted to increase the response rate. The second follow-up was sent to a randomly

selected sample of the remaining non-respondent subjects.

Table 2 indicates the number of returned questionnaires by subject group.

TABLE 2
SURVEY RESPONSE TOTALS BY SUBJECT GROUP

Item	Superintendents	School Board Presidents	State Education Officials
Total Mailed	2,583	2,423	36
Total Returned	1,200	664	30
Total Return %	46.5%	27.4%*	83.3%*

*Rounded

In Table 3, data are presented which describe the number of subjects responding to the survey by group among the six states.

TABLE 3

State	Number Mailed			Number Returned			Percent		
	Supts.	Sch. Bd.	SEAs	Supts.	Sch. Bd.	SEAs	Supts.	Sch. Bd.	SEAs
Arkansas	371	376	5	166	101	3	45%	27%	60%
Louisiana	67	65	5	51	32	3	76%	49%	60%
Mississippi	168	168	5	89	58	5	53%	35%	100%
New Mexico	95	91	5	58	40	4	42%	44%	80%
Oklahoma	716	637	5	265	160	5	37%	25%	100%
Texas	1,121	1,086	11	561	271	9	50%	25%	82%

4. Definition of Terms

For purposes of this study, the following are working definitions of terms used throughout this report:

a. Parent Involvement* - all activities which allow parents and/or other citizens to participate and become partners in the educational process, at home or in school, including information exchange, decision sharing, services for schools, home tutoring/teaching, advocacy and other collaborative efforts to enhance children's learning and success. (*For purposes of this project, the focus is on parent involvement at the elementary school level.)

b. Home Tutor Role - involvement of parents in children's education at home with respect to school and non-school learning activities.

c. Audience Role - involvement of parents in activities which generally requires their presence but no real active participation (e.g., school play, special program, etc.).

d. School Program Supporter Role - involvement of parents in activities which lend support to the school's program and requires them to take an active part (e.g., classroom volunteers, chaperones for trips, collect funds, etc.).

e. Co-Learner Role - involvement of parents in efforts where they receive training, knowledge and/or skills about aspects of education along with other school staff or children.

f. Paid School Staff Role - involvement of parents as part of the school's paid staff (e.g., classroom aides, assistant teachers, parent educators, etc.).

g. Advocate Role - involvement of parents where they serve as an activist or spokesperson on issues regarding school policies, community concerns, etc.

h. Decision-Maker Role - involvement of parents as co-equals with school staff in decisions relating to governance of the school.

D. RESULTS

This survey was directed at three groups of educational policy makers: district superintendents, district school board presidents, and state education agency officials. The superintendents and school board presidents were given a parallel survey which asked about their attitudes toward specific aspects of parent involvement, about current practices of involving parents in their schools, and about any district policies which encouraged specific types of parent involvement.

Selected state education agency officials were also asked about their attitudes toward specific aspects of parent involvement. Instead of asking about district practices, they were asked whether their state department of education provided technical assistance related to specific activities in the area of parent involvement. Also, these officials were asked about state level policies which encouraged districts to implement specific types of parent involvement.

In Part One of the survey, respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with 20 statements about parent involvement. Although there was great variation in response within all three groups, the mean response for each of the groups tended to be quite similar for many of the statements. In general, they agreed most strongly with statements that (1) teachers should provide parents with ideas about helping with homework, (2) teachers should consider parent involvement part of their job, (3) teachers should be included in curriculum and instruction decisions, and

(4) principals should provide teachers with suggestions for working with parents (see Table 4). However, responses of state education agency officials tended to be more positive than either the responses of the superintendents or those of school board presidents.

There was also great similarity in the negative responses of all three groups. They all strongly disagreed with statements that parents should be involved in administrative decisions, or in the performance evaluation of either teachers or principals.

There was some disagreement among the three groups in that superintendents felt more strongly that parents needed training in order to be involved in school decisions, school board presidents felt more strongly that parents should take the initiative in getting involved in the schools, and state education agency officials felt more strongly that the district should provide guidelines for both principals and teachers to help them involve parents in schools.

In Part Two all three groups of respondents were asked to evaluate the usefulness of having parents involved in eleven school decisions. All three groups had a mean response across the eleven items of about 3.0, the mid-point of the scale. However, there was also a distinct pattern of high and low responses which was quite similar across the three respondent groups.

They each thought parent involvement would be most useful in making placement decisions about (1) placing their children in special education, (2) evaluating their own children's progress in school, or (3) joining in disciplinary decisions regarding their own children (see Table 5). They were also relatively positive about involving parents in the more community-oriented decisions related to planning for school desegregation. All three groups were somewhat less enthusiastic about the value of having parents involved in curriculum and instruction decisions such as selecting teaching materials, determining the amount of homework to be assigned, or selecting classroom discipline methods. Again, superintendents, school board presidents, and state education agency officials generally agreed that parent involvement in administrative decisions such as setting priorities for the school budget and hiring or firing school staff was the least useful way to involve parents.

In Part Three of the survey each group of policy makers was asked to evaluate which parent involvement roles were most important for effective schools. As shown in Table 6, there was agreement across all three groups of policy makers that having parents in the roles of audience and home tutor with their children was most important for effective schools.

There was also considerable agreement across the three groups that parents in the roles of paid school staff or co-learners were least important of the roles presented, although the ratings of the state education agency officials were considerably more positive than those of the superintendents or school board presidents.

TABLE 4
SUPERINTENDENTS AND SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENTS STRONGLY AGREED WITH THESE STATEMENTS

Superintendents (n = 1,200)	Mean
Teachers should provide parents with ideas about helping with school assignments.	3.50
Teachers should consider working with parents as part of their jobs.	3.41
Teachers should be included in curriculum and instruction decisions in schools.	3.38
Principals should provide teachers with suggestions for working with parents.	3.36
Parents need to be trained before they are involved in school decision making.	3.08

School Board Presidents (n = 664)	Mean
Teachers should provide parents with ideas about helping with school assignments.	3.47
Teachers should consider working with parents as part of their jobs.	3.32
Principals should provide teachers with suggestions for working with parents.	3.29
Teachers should be included in curriculum and instruction decisions in schools.	3.23
Parents should take the initiative for getting involved in the schools.	3.11

STATE AGENCY OFFICIALS STRONGLY AGREED WITH THESE STATEMENTS

State Education Agency Officials (n = 30)	Mean
Teachers should be included in curriculum and instruction decisions in the schools.	3.77
Teachers should provide parents with ideas about helping with school assignments.	3.60
Principals should provide teachers with suggestions for working with parents.	3.57
Teachers should consider working with parents as part of jobs.	3.47
School districts should provide guidelines to help principals and teachers involve parents.	3.33

TABLE 5
SUPERINTENDENTS AND SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENTS THOUGHT PARENT INPUT WOULD BE MOST USEFUL IN THESE SCHOOL DECISIONS

Superintendents (n = 1,200)	Mean
Placement decisions in Special Education.	2.96
Evaluating their own children's learning.	2.86
Discipline decisions affecting their child.	2.86
Planning for school desegregation.	2.79
Determining amount of homework assigned.	2.43

School Board Presidents (n = 664)	Mean
Evaluating their own children's learning.	2.86
Placement decisions in Special Education.	2.78
Discipline decisions affecting their child.	2.76
Planning for school desegregation.	2.45
Determining amount of homework assigned.	2.28

STATE EDUCATION AGENCY OFFICIALS THOUGHT PARENT INPUT WOULD BE MOST USEFUL IN THESE SCHOOL DECISIONS

State Agency Officials (n = 30	Mean*
Planning for school desegregation.	3.83
Discipline decisions affecting their child.	3.62
Placement decisions in Special Education.	3.48
Determining amount of homework assigned.	3.38
Evaluating their own children's learning.	3.00

There was some disagreement among the three groups about the importance of having parents in the role of decision maker. Superintendents and school board presidents tended to give this role a much lower rating than did the state education agency officials. This indicates that local policy makers see the decision maker role as much less important than do education agency officials in making schools more effective.

In Part Four of the survey, superintendents and school board presidents were asked to indicate how many schools in their district offered each of 20 different parent involvement activities. However, the education agency officials were asked to indicate how often their agency provided technical assistance activities related to each of these same parent involvement activities.

In order to compare the relative responses of superintendents, school board presidents and state education agency officials, mean scores were calculated for each of the activities and they were ranked according to these means. The parent involvement activities most likely to be offered in the schools according to superintendents and school board presidents are shown in Table 7.

These most common parent involvement activities correspond to the most traditional roles for parents in the schools. Although their responses are somewhat different, the education agency officials indicated that their technical assistance efforts also were most commonly related to those activities corresponding to traditional parent involvement roles. These officials also indicated their agencies were often involved in technical assistance which focused on getting parents to assist with the establishment of school educational goals. However, this activity was not likely to be offered in the schools according to superintendents and school board presidents in this survey.

The parent involvement activities least likely to be offered in the schools according to the superintendents and school board presidents are shown in Table 8. Again, there is a strong similarity between the responses of the superintendents and those of school board presidents. The five activities rated as least likely to be offered in the schools are those which involve parents in (1) hiring or firing decisions, (2) the performance evaluation of school staff, or (3) school budget decisions. Also listed as unlikely activities for parent participation are activities to train parents as home tutors, or activities in which parents assist in some way with classroom instruction.

According to the education agency officials, the parent involvement activities least likely to be the topic of technical assistance included parent participation in (1) hiring and firing decisions, (2) performance evaluation of school staff, (3) fund raising activities for the schools, (4) school budget decisions, and (5) school inservice activities. A comparison of the responses of all three groups as shown in Table 8, indicates that parent involvement activities corresponding to the role of decision

TABLE 6
PARENT INVOLVEMENT ROLES CONSIDERED MOST IMPORTANT IN MAKING SCHOOLS MORE EFFECTIVE*
ACCORDING TO SUPERINTENDENTS AND SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENTS

Superintendents (n = 1,200)	Mean
Audience	4.34
Home Tutor	4.16
School Supporter	3.78
Decision Maker	3.15
Advocate	2.99
Paid School Staff	2.95
Co-Learner	2.87

School Board Presidents (n = 664)	Mean
Audience	4.46
Home Tutor	4.27
School Supporter	3.97
Advocate	3.17
Decision Maker	3.14
Co-Learner	2.86
Paid School Staff	2.85

PARENT INVOLVEMENT ROLES CONSIDERED MOST IMPORTANT IN MAKING SCHOOLS MORE EFFECTIVE*
ACCORDING TO STATE EDUCATION AGENCY OFFICIALS

State Education Agency Officials (n = 30)	Mean
Audience	4.39
Home Tutor	4.32
Decision Maker	4.11
School Supporter	3.93
Advocate	3.82
Paid School Staff	3.54
Co-Learner	3.54

*Using a 5-point scale where 1 = Not Important and 5 = Very Important.

TABLE 7
PARENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES MOST LIKELY TO BE OFFERED IN THE SCHOOLS*
ACCORDING TO SUPERINTENDENTS AND SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENTS

Superintendents (n = 1,200)	Mean
Parents attending school activities such as "open house" or other programs.	3.79
Parents attending parent-teacher conferences regarding their children.	3.56
Parents assisting their children with school assignments at home.	3.42
Getting parents to chaperone for school activities.	3.31
Getting parents to assist with such social activities as pot-luck suppers, coffees, etc.	3.30

School Board Presidents (n = 664)	Mean
Parents attending school activities such as "open house" or other programs.	3.70
Getting parents to assist their children with school assignments at home.	3.43
Parents attending parent-teacher conferences regarding their children.	3.40
Getting parents to chaperone for school activities.	3.34
Getting parents to assist with such social activities as pot-luck suppers, coffees, etc.	3.27

PARENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES MOST LIKELY TO BE THE TOPIC OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE*
OFFERED BY STATE EDUCATION AGENCY OFFICIALS

State Education Agency Officials (n = 30)	Mean
Getting parents to attend parent-teacher conferences regarding their children.	2.86
Getting parents to assist their children with school assignments at home.	2.86
Getting parents to help identify school needs or problem areas.	2.76
Getting parents to attend school activities such as "open house" or other programs.	2.72
Getting parents to assist with the establishment of school educational goals.	2.72

maker are not only least common in the schools but also least likely to be the topic of technical assistance activities offered by the state education agency.

In Part Five of the survey, superintendents and school board presidents were asked if their district had either unwritten or written policies encouraging various types of parent involvement activities. The state education agency officials were asked whether their agency had either unwritten or written policies encouraging the same parent involvement activities at the district level in their states.

In general, a comparison of responses from the district and state level suggests that there are very few written policies encouraging different aspects of parent involvement (see Table 9). Perhaps the most prevalent type of written policy focuses on the rights of parents to participate in placement decisions regarding their own children. The next most prevalent type of policy seems to be that which focuses on informing parents when their child violates the district's discipline policy. Except for these two types of parent involvement, formal policies focusing on involving parents in some aspect of the school seemed to be relatively uncommon, either at the district or the state level.

In addition to these two types of parent involvement, the next most common policy encouraging parent involvement at either the district or state level was a policy focused on encouraging parent participation in decisions regarding educational programs such as Title I, Head Start, bilingual education, or basic skills education.

There was also considerable agreement among the three groups with regard to parent-teacher conferences. Approximately 37% of the superintendents in the survey and 41% of the school board presidents in the survey indicated their districts had policies encouraging parents to participate in parent-teacher conferences concerning their child's progress. In contrast, about 18% of the education agency officials indicated that their state had a written policy encouraging parents to attend these parent-teacher conferences.

Almost 19% of the education agency officials indicated their state had a policy encouraging parent participation in decisions regarding curriculum and instruction matters such as selection of teaching materials, determining educational goals, and selecting teaching strategies. In contrast, less than 11% of the superintendents indicated their district had such a policy, and approximately 9% of the school board presidents indicated they had such a policy in their district.

In summary, it seems that at the state level, policies related to parent involvement focused on getting parents involved in (1) placement decisions involving their children, (2) decisions regarding the inclusion of compensatory education programs in their schools, and (3) making sure that parents are informed of any violations of the district's discipline policy by their children. At the district level, policies encouraging par-

TABLE 8
PARENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES LEAST LIKELY TO BE OFFERED IN THE SCHOOLS
ACCORDING TO SUPERINTENDENTS AND SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENTS

Superintendents (n = 1,200)	Mean
Participation in decisions about hiring/firing of school staff.	1.03
Participation in evaluation of school staff.	1.13
Participation in school budget decisions.	1.32
Parent participation in activities to train them for home tutoring.	1.56
Parents assisting in classroom instruction.	1.71

School Board Presidents (n = 664)	Mean
Participation in decisions about hiring/firing of school staff.	1.04
Parent participation in the evaluation of school staff.	1.19
Parent participation in school budget decisions.	1.28
Parent participation in activities to train them for home tutoring.	1.48
Parents assisting in classroom instruction.	1.56

PARENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES LEAST LIKELY TO BE THE TOPIC OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
OFFERED BY AGENCY PERSONNEL TO THE SCHOOLS

State Education Agency Officials (n = 30)	Mean
Parent participation in decisions about hiring/firing school staff.	1.10
Parent participation in evaluation of school staff.	1.48
Parent participation in fund raising activities for the school.	1.66
Parent participation in school budget decisions.	2.03
Parent participation in school inservice activities with school staff.	2.17

TABLE 9

PERCENTAGE OF SUPERINTENDENTS
INDICATING THEIR DISTRICTS HAVE POLICIES
ENCOURAGING PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Rank	Types of Parent Involvement	% With Written Policy
1	Parent participation in placement of their child in special education programs.	88.0
2	Informing parents of violations of discipline policy by their children.	79.0
3	Parent participation in decisions regarding educational programs such as Title I, Head Start, etc.	48.0
4	Parent participation in parent-teacher conferences.	36.9
5	Parent participation in decisions regarding the retaining of their children.	25.6

PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENTS
INDICATING THEIR DISTRICTS HAVE POLICIES
ENCOURAGING PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Rank	Types of Parent Involvement	% With Written Policy
1	Informing parents of violations of discipline policy by their children.	83.6
2	Parent participation in placement of their child in special education programs.	64.7
3	Parent participation in parent-teacher conferences.	41.4
4	Parent participation in decisions regarding educational programs such as Title I, Head Start, etc.	32.8
5	Sending information home to parents about school activities.	30.2

INDICATION BY STATE AGENCY OFFICIALS OF POLICIES
ENCOURAGING PARENT INVOLVEMENT AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL

Rank	Types of Parent Involvement	% With Written Policy
1	Parent participation in placement of their child in special education programs.	92.9
2	Parent participation in decisions regarding educational programs such as Title I, Head Start, etc.	53.6
3	Informing parents of violation of discipline by their children.	25.0
4	Parent participation in decisions regarding curriculum and instruction such as selection of teaching materials, determining educational goals, etc.	18.5
5	Parent participation in parent-teacher conferences.	17.9

ent involvement also focused on getting parents involved in parent-teacher conferences concerning their child's progress. In this six-state region, it seems uncommon for there to be policies at either the state or district level which encourage parent involvement in either curriculum and instruction decisions or in administrative decisions in the schools.

E. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Previous Surveys

The focus of our original survey was to ask about parent involvement training in the teacher preparation curriculum for elementary school teachers. Teacher educators in colleges and universities in SEDL's six-state region were asked about their attitude towards parent involvement in schools and if any type of parent involvement training was integrated into their teacher training program. We also asked if they personally taught about parent involvement in any way in their courses for elementary education majors.

Teacher educators responded favorably to the general idea of parent involvement. However, most indicated parent involvement training was not really a component in the curriculum for elementary school teachers at their institutions. Of those who responded that they did try to address parent involvement in their teaching, only a few taught a course or even a module on the topic. Most indicated they generally tried to weave teaching about parent involvement into their courses when it seemed relevant.

The results of this first survey indicated that teacher educators were open to the idea of parent involvement in schools, although they did not spend much time teaching elementary education majors about working with parents. However, in reviewing the results, it was difficult to determine whether those responding to the survey interpreted parent involvement to mean sending messages home to parents, involving parents in parent-teacher conferences, involving them as volunteers in the schools, or involving them in the actual administration of the schools.

The second and third surveys in this series were designed to assess attitudes towards parent involvement among elementary school teachers and principals. Items were added which asked teachers and principals about specific types of parent involvement roles and activities, their general attitude towards parent involvement in schools, and what specific ways they thought parents could best be involved in schools.

To tie their responses to our previous survey of teacher educators, the teachers and principals were also asked whether they thought parent involvement should be included as part of teacher training, and whether their own college preparation had included any training about how to work with parents.

Finally, they were asked to describe the extent of current parent involvement activities in their schools. This provided information about

which parent involvement activities were most common in the schools, but it also allowed a comparison of teacher and principal attitudes with current practices in the schools.

In responding to the survey, both teachers and principals gave a strong, favorable response to general questions about the value and importance of parent involvement in the schools. Their responses were very similar to those obtained from teacher educators. However, this apparent consensus about the importance of involving parents was clarified when responses to the more specific questions were analyzed.

Teachers and principals were less enthusiastic about the value of having parents involved in less traditional roles such as being advocates for their children (the Advocate role), attending inservice training with school staff (the Co-learner role), or participating in various school decisions (the Decision Maker role).

In summary, both principals and teachers favored increased parent involvement in the schools, but both groups preferred this involvement to be in the traditional ways parents have supported school efforts. Although a small number of both teachers and principals supported the parent roles which involved sharing power in the schools, a substantial majority of both groups did not see this type of parent involvement as valuable.

The responses of both teachers and principals were also similar in that both groups reported that their schools did not currently sponsor a wide variety of parent involvement activities. Their descriptions of current practices corresponded somewhat to their own preferences in that the traditional parent involvement activities were apparently much more widespread than were activities which called on parents to participate in any educational decisions. The surprising pattern in these results was the fact that even the most traditional, most accepted types of parent involvement activities were reported as being atypical of current practices in the schools. So, although both groups supported these traditional types of parent involvement, they indicated such activities were, in fact, uncommon in their own school.

With regard to teacher training, teachers and principals agreed with the teacher educators that parent involvement was important in that it constituted a growing role for elementary school teachers. They also agreed that parent involvement should be addressed in the undergraduate training curriculum by offering a course on the topic. Most of those responding indicated they had not received any training to work with parents in their own professional preparation. Both principals and teachers agreed that new teachers should receive training to work with parents as part of their undergraduate program.

In order to explore the possibility that parent involvement in the schools was uncommon because of parent apathy, the fourth survey in the series focused on the parents themselves. The survey instrument used with teachers and principals was reworded in order to ask parents the same basic

questions without using unfamiliar educational terms. In addition, questions asking about teacher training were excluded from the parents' questionnaire and they were asked how they thought parent involvement in the schools might be enhanced.

Parents with children in elementary school were targeted for the survey and they wre contacted through the state and local PTA organizations in our six-state region.

These parents were asked the same general questions to assess their attitude toward parent involvement in the schools, and they were asked the same specific questions designed to assess their preference regarding the various types of parent involvement. They were also asked about the extent to which they actually participated in various parent involvement activities in their children's schools.

Responses from parents indicated that their attitudes towards parent involvement were favorable, and even more positive than those of teacher educators, teachers or principals. They indicated a high level of interest in both the traditional parent involvement roles (Audience, School Supporter and Home Tutor) and in the power sharing roles (Advocate, Co-learner, and Decision Maker). When their responses were ranked, they indicated the strongest interest in the traditional roles, but a sizeable number of parents also indicated a strong interest in participating in school decisions. Their responses agreed with those of the teachers and principals in that all three groups gave their strongest support to the traditional parent involvement roles. There was a high degree of consensus across the three surveys for increasing parent involvement in these types of roles.

Although parents indicated slightly less interest in becoming involved in the other parent involvement roles, the absolute level of their responses was still quite high, indicating a high level of parent interest in these roles.

The high level of parent interest in these roles was contrasted with the relatively low level of support for the roles given by both teachers and principals. This comparison of results suggests that parent apathy is probably not the main barrier to involving parents in either the traditional or the non-traditional roles.

The responses of parents regarding their own participation in parent involvement activities also corresponded closely to the description of current school practices obtained from the teachers and principals. The parents indicated they most frequently participated in activities which related primarily to their own child or to the traditional roles for parents in the schools. They helped their children with homework, attended parent-teacher conferences, went to open house at the school, helped with school social activities such as pot-luck suppers, and attended PTA meetings.

In contrast, they indicated that they rarely participated in either curriculum and instruction decisions or administrative decisions at the school. The overall level of their responses also indicated substantial disparity between their reported level of interest and their actual participation in the various parent involvement activities. This pattern was quite similar to that of the teachers and principals.

2. Present Survey

During the current year, project staff focused upon policy makers in education to assess their attitudes towards parent involvement, to get their description of current practices in the schools, and to ask them about specific policies which might encourage various types of parent involvement. District superintendents and school board presidents, as well as selected state education agency officials, completed parallel survey questionnaires which were modified versions of the instrument used with teachers, principals and parents.

The results of the previous surveys suggest that responses of superintendents and school board presidents are very similar to those of teachers and principals. They support the general idea of parent involvement, but when asked specific questions, they indicate moderately strong support for involving parents in the traditional roles in the schools, and substantially less support for the roles which call for power sharing. Although the size of the sample was small for the state education agency officials (n = 30), the pattern of their responses was more similar to that of the parents. They indicated very strong support for the traditional parent involvement roles, but they also gave moderately strong support to the roles of Decision Maker, Advocate and Co-learner.

The responses from superintendents and school board presidents also correspond to those from teachers and principals in that they describe current practices in their districts as consisting mainly of the more traditional parent involvement activities.

When asked about state and district policies encouraging various types of parent involvement, the most widespread policies were those which encouraged parent participation in special education placement decisions. Other fairly common policies were those encouraging schools to inform parents of their child's discipline problems, those encouraging parents to participate in decisions about compensatory programs in the schools, and those encouraging parents to attend parent-teacher conferences. Policies which encouraged parent involvement in curriculum and instruction decisions were very unusual, and those encouraging parent participation in administrative decisions were rarer still.

The results across all five of the surveys conducted to date consistently demonstrate that parent involvement in the schools can be interpreted in many different ways, and that each way has its supporters and its opponents. Therefore, whether one is talking about training teachers for parent involvement, about implementing parent involvement pro-

grams, or about developing district policies for parent involvement, it is first necessary to clearly specify how parent involvement is being defined. The following section contains recommendations for teacher training and for promoting parent involvement in the schools, and each recommendation is based upon project results and on a conceptual framework which includes different types of parent involvement.

3. Recommendations for Teacher Training

Based upon the combined results from this survey and the three previous ones, the following recommendations are offered regarding the training (preservice and inservice) of elementary teachers for parent involvement:

First, parent involvement should not be taught as a series of unrelated tasks and skills. It should be approached as a developmental sequence progressing from the more traditional types of parent involvement where parents are asked to cooperate with school staff, to the types of parent involvement in which school staff provide services to parents, to the types where parents and school staff work together essentially as partners in education.

Second, preservice teacher education should focus first on providing prospective teachers with an overview of the various models of parent involvement and second, on providing them with knowledge about potential benefits and costs of each model.

Third, with respect to the various parent involvement models, prospective teachers should learn how working with parents can (a) potentially improve their classroom work, (b) develop better relationships with children's parents, and (c) develop community support for the schools. Thus, parent involvement must be presented to preservice teachers in such a way that it is not viewed as an optional interest area, but instead as a necessary complement to coursework focused on developing instructional knowledge and skills.

Fourth, after teaching about parent involvement and the reasons for encouraging it, the training sequence should address specific knowledge bases related to each specific type of parent involvement. For example, with regard to involving parents as home tutors, teachers should be taught the differences between teaching children and teaching their adult parents.

Fifth, once prospective teachers have been motivated to learn about parent involvement and have mastered the relevant knowledge for each model of parent involvement, they should be given opportunities to learn and practice the skills necessary to apply that knowledge with parents. This will help ensure that teachers are comfortable with the concept of parent involvement and are able to integrate it into their work.

Sixth, a preservice training program, as priority, might want to focus on the attitudes, knowledge and skills which relate to the most traditional parent involvement roles. Not only are these roles most widely accepted in the schools, but also they are most congruent with the needs of young, beginning teachers in the schools. This could help minimize apprehensions about parent involvement and instead create a more positive frame of mind regarding its usefulness.

Seventh, inservice training should also begin with a developmental framework for looking at the various models of parent involvement. Survey results indicate that more teachers, more administrators and more parents support the role of parents as audience, but there are also significant numbers in each group favoring the models in which parents and school staff function as partners in the educational process. So involving parents as audience is a good first step. However, in certain districts, the relationship between parents and the school may already be much more developed.

Eighth, inservice training should also focus first on positive attitudes and teachers' motivation as an initial step toward working with parents. Once these are established, training should move on to knowledge and then to actually developing requisite skills. This sequence of training suggests that inservice training for parent involvement should probably consist of a series of workshops rather than a one day, one time workshop.

4. Recommendations for Improving Parent Involvement in Schools

Based upon results from our four surveys, these recommendations are made regarding the enhancement of parent involvement activities/programs at the elementary school level:

First, in addition to providing preservice and inservice training for teachers, principals and other school administrators should be included in parent involvement training activities as they often set the rules and norms in schools. If they are not aware of the benefits of parent involvement and/or are not skilled in working with parents, school administrators may set norms which discourage teachers from using the parent involvement skills and knowledge they have acquired.

Second, in order to encourage school district staff at all levels to develop better relations with parents, district policies should be written so that they clearly specify this as a desired goal. Responses from the superintendents' and school board presidents' surveys indicate that the existence of written policies encouraging parent involvement is related to increased levels of a variety of parent activities in the schools.

Third, if districts are designing a parent involvement program, they should again view the various types of parent involvement as a developmental sequence, both from the teachers' and the parents' point

of view. Increasing parent involvement in the role of audience requires comparatively less effort and skill on the part of both teachers and parents than would parent involvement as home tutors, decision makers, advocates or co-learners. Therefore, the skill levels and estimates of available time for each should be considered in deciding which types of parent involvement should be the focus of program efforts.

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